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DOI:

[10.6092/2035-7680/2562](https://doi.org/10.6092/2035-7680/2562)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Sims, C. (2012). Occidentalism at War: Al-Qaida's Resistance Rhetoric. *Altre Modernità*, 8, 206-220.  
<https://doi.org/10.6092/2035-7680/2562>

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**The published version is available at:**

**DOI:** [10.6092/2035-7680/2562]

**This version:** [Post Print/Publisher Final Draft]

URL identifying the publication in the King's Portal:

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## *Occidentalism at War: Al-Qaida's Resistance Rhetoric*

by Christopher Sims<sup>1</sup>

In the acclaimed American television drama *Homeland*, terrorist mastermind Abu Nazir says to his former prisoner, Marine Sergeant Nicholas Brody, "We only begin as enemies because that is what others told us to be. Are we enemies now?" (*Crossfire* 2011). The scene is important for two reasons. Firstly, it shows the power of language in constructing identities. Secondly, the conversation takes place via webcam, demonstrating the prominence of new technologies in the current terrorism/counterterrorism landscape. Like the fictional Abu Nazir, al-Qaida ideologues have waged war against the West using rhetoric as a tool to frame their enemy and new media to propagate their message.

This article compares the rhetoric of al-Qaida ideologues Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Bakr Naji, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and Anwar al-Awlaki to aspects of a resistance framework postulated by Edward Said and Frantz Fanon.<sup>2</sup> It is argued that al-Qaida construct the West pejoratively and as the aggressor thus representing the Islamic nation (*ummah*) as victim. They consider the media battle central to resistance. But whilst promulgating their message against the West has raised the organization's profile, it also exposed them to increased scrutiny. Western translations, critiques and commentary on primary sources have created a space within the

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<sup>1</sup> The author thanks two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this article.

<sup>2</sup> Osama bin Laden was the Saudi-born former leader of al-Qaida; Ayman al-Zawahiri is the Egyptian-born former deputy now leader; Abu Bakr Naji is a strategist about whom little is known; Abu Mus'ab al-Suri is a Syrian-born strategist; Anwar al-Awlaki was an Islamic cleric and American citizen of Yemeni descent linked with the organization.



academy where this counter-discourse is accommodated, understood and even vaccinated against.

Previously, much scholarship of the al-Qaida organization has suffered from an "outside-in" perspective and an "oversimplification" without sufficient reference to primary sources (Hellmich 2008: 111). More generally, investigating group discourse can be problematic: the literature of groups has a tendency to be "invoked selectively and impressionistically to illustrate certain a priori conclusions" (Verner 1995: 65).<sup>3</sup> However, this article utilises recent scholarship, particularly from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, which has resulted in globally-available translated primary sources. This affords a greater ability to deconstruct the strands of al-Qaida's ideology than has been possible previously.<sup>4</sup>

#### CREATING THE UN-ISLAMIC OTHER

Occidentalism is the construction of a West through which the Orient identifies itself as its binary opposite. Occidentalism can assist resistance narratives against Western intervention.<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi goes as far as to call for a science of Occidentalism (*istighrab*) which would serve as "a discipline constituted in Third World countries in order to complete the process of decolonization" where the objective is to frame the West in "order to enable a clearer sense of an independent Islamic (more specifically, Arab Muslim) sense of self" (Bonnett 2006: 5).

Eastern representations of West are not new. The West as an external other has been considered in Russia, Asia and in the Middle East "for at least a century before it entered into the West's own lexicon of key geo-political categories" (*Ibid.*: 2). Hence for the scholar Sadik al-Azm, if there is Orientalism, there is also an Orientalism in reverse which favours Islam and the East (al-Azm 1981). In reverse, Islam is the primary facilitator of this prejudice. Indeed for al-Azm, the Islamic aspect of resistance changed the political literature, with "its insistence on replacing the familiar opposition of national liberation against imperialist domination by the more reactionary opposition of East against West" (*Ibid.*).

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<sup>3</sup> I define discourse as a body of statements which offer a framework for understanding the world. This framework functions as a dominating method of thought; a truth which is then imposed upon subjugated groups.

<sup>4</sup> Following Malcolm B. Hamilton, I define ideology loosely as, "a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or maintain." (Hamilton 1987: 38).

<sup>5</sup> For the importance of political narratives, see, Shenhav 2006.



In resistance narratives against the West, it is Western actions which necessitate and justify resistance (Fanon 1989: 47). In his polemical *Occidentosis*, the Iranian Jalal al-I Ahmad laments the submission of East to West, especially as an unquestioning consumer of Western industrial products (Ahmad 1984). Hence, rather than being the preserve of sophisticated Western apparatus (Bessis 2003: 40) a narrative of justification is necessary for mobilising any peoples to violence. Narratives of the colonized have been obscured simply as a consequence of the domination of Western literature and media: it is the winners of wars who write their histories.

This inability of the subaltern to speak is problematic in generating justifications which reach a meaningful audience. In the decolonization era, the war was in the literature and over the airwaves. Hence Said saw the absence of literature originating in non-Western nations as a problem: In *The Question of Palestine*, he argues that "One of the features of a small non-European people is that it is not wealthy in documents, nor in histories, autobiographies, chronicles, and the like" (Said 1980: xii-xiii). The absence of native literature allowed the West to create the place with its own knowledge (*Ibid.*: 9).

For Said, the discourse which is propagated by the non-Palestinians ensures the "impossibility of finding a space in which to speak for the Palestinians" (*Ibid.*: 40). Literature allows justification and representation. If discourse functions as an exhortation to violence, it follows that the production and dissemination of literature is a conflict in and of itself. Hence, for al-Qaida ideologues the inability of the subaltern to make heard its own voice is a specific concern. Osama bin Laden argued that Bush's binary reading of the war on terror meant that a "lot of countries that can't speak for themselves followed this powerful world terrorism [of the USA]" (cited in Lawrence 2005: 113-114). Moreover: "previously, the Americans did to us whatever they pleased, and the victim wasn't even allowed to complain" (cited in Lawrence 2005: 114).

Alongside the physical resistance there exists "a struggle over the historical and cultural record" (Harlow 1993: 7). Hence discourse and the literature from which it originates can provide the framework for the reconstruction of an independent historical trajectory. Colonialism "turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon 2001: 169), thus "the process of decolonization is intimately concerned with the recovering of lost and occluded histories, the reclaiming of the many pasts silenced under colonialism" (Childs and Williams 1997: 209). Edward Said goes further, asserting that resistance can create an alternative modernity; that "far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, [it] is an alternative way of conceiving human history" (Said 1994: 259).

The narrative of the al-Qaida organization is one such attempt to conceive an alternative modernity, independent of the West. To recover an Islamic heritage, the organization, echoing other pan-Islamic narratives, has invoked the earliest generations of Islam, the righteous predecessors (*al-salif al-salih*), to construct a base



from before the colonial era through which to produce its own independent history. Such invocations have the secondary purpose of pursuing legitimacy by reference to tradition (Lockman 2004: 230; Lahoud 2010: 119) and are not unique to the jihadist organizations.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, writing in the Nineteenth century, Karl Marx argued that revolutionaries “anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past” and “borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes” that allow the “new scene of world history” to be dressed up in “time-honoured disguise” (Marx 2008: 15).

#### INVOKING ISLAM

For the jihadists then, the proper value system is found in an untainted Islam. And, in restoring the lost Caliphate (Lawrence 2005: 121), there is a geographical template for the re-conquest of this Islamic space from Western domination. The Caliphate allows a physical entity to be identified, such that for bin Laden, “the battle isn’t between the al-Qaida organization and the global Crusaders. Rather, the battle is between Muslims – the people of Islam – and the global Crusaders” (cited in Lawrence 2005: 108). It is hence a clash of civilizations; the Huntington thesis that Bin Laden explicitly endorses in an interview with *al-Jazeera* reporter Taysir Alluni (Lawrence 2005: 124-125). Jihadists consider that Islam alone possesses the power to liberate from Western hegemony. Indeed, for the strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, the world order, led by the United States, would “never accept a state ruled by Islamic law” because “such a state had its own civilization and its own ideology, independent of the World Order” (cited in Lia 2007: 238). In this reading there is no difference between the Orientalist and the Islamist, for they “go hand in hand, each stressing the essential, determinant, character of the Islamic religion” (Halliday 1993: 155).

The narrative of one people united by religion is not a jihadist creation. Frantz Fanon, examining resistance in the Arab world argued that whilst there is a struggle for national liberty, it “has been accompanied by a cultural phenomenon known by the name of the awakening of Islam” (Fanon 2001: 171). Indeed, al-Qaida frames its conflict as part of a perpetual struggle of Islam in which historical precedents, such as Saladin’s re-conquest of land lost to the Crusaders, are keystones (Naji 2006: 29, 214; Lawrence 2005: 218). Therein lies the successful conditions for resistance; fundamental principles must be learned from Muslim ancestors who triumphed against the Crusaders (Naji 2006: 65) in order to reinvigorate an *ummah* that is now “crushed, deprived of its will” (Naji 2006: 100). So powerful is the idea of the Islamic holy war that for the cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, “Our children need to be raised up with the love of Jihad

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<sup>6</sup> I define contemporary jihadism loosely as a duty incumbent upon believers to take up violent defense of the *ummah* against the forces of unbelief. The contract is solely a religious one between the individual and God, entirely absent of engagement with the socio-political sphere.





and the mujahideen. The stories we narrate to them need to stem from our rich Jihad history" (al-Awlaki 2006: 12).

## OPPOSING THE WEST

For the 'self' to be represented as a virtuous Islamic nation it is necessary to construct an un-Islamic other. The formation echoes that of Said's Orientalism, which creates an "imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, 'different' one called the Orient, the other, also known as 'our world', called the Occident or the West" (Said 1997: 4). Said further argued that "When the Orient has uniformly been considered an inferior part of the world, it has always been endowed both with greater size and with a greater potential for power (usually destructive) than the West" (*Ibid.*). Mirroring this formation, in creating the discourse for war, al-Qaida constructed a West with greater size and with a greater potential for destructive power than the nation of Islam.

For the political theorist Samuel Huntington, antagonistic groupings on the world stage are likely to be between civilizations (Huntington 1993a, 1993b). Huntington suggests a Confucian-Islamic connection as an existential threat to Western-led post-Cold War stability (Huntington 1993a: 39-45). Similarly, whilst Edward Said critiques Huntington's reductive, "undesirably vague and manipulable [sic] abstractions" (Said 1998: 5 and *passim*), Said nevertheless employs a comparably wide lens when depicting the United States as the post-Cold War leader but with potential for destruction, arguing that only Islam possesses the necessary character and capability to resist: "Whereas most other great cultural groupings appear to have accepted the United States' role, it is only from within the Islamic world that signs of determined resistance are still strong" (Said 1997: xxix). These large units are a convenient identity: Al-Qaida ideologues too assert Islam's ability to resist where success will lie in the spreading of culture and ideology (Lia 2006: 392) to reclaim the territory of Islam lost to the West (Lahoud 2010: 190).

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENEMIES

Apostate regimes and unbelievers in the Muslim world represent an enemy within the territory of Islam. Hence Islamic resistance groups had previously focused on toppling corrupt internal regimes rather than focusing on an external enemy such as the West. The academic Fawaz Gerges lists three reasons for the transition from internal to external (Western) enemy: first, the collapse of Soviet Union (hence the necessity for a new antagonist); second, the Gulf War 1990-1991; third, the defeat of



Islamist rebels in state-centric revolutions in Algeria and Egypt. For Gerges, it was in the mid-1990s that there emerged a trans-nationalist jihad (Gerges 2005: 144). Moreover, Gerges suggests that "bin Laden reportedly argued that internal strife alienated the *ummah*" (*Ibid.*). The solution was to search for an enemy external to the Islamic nation which could be framed homogenously and pejoratively.

Whilst Gerges sees physical events as responsible for the change in emphasis from internal to external antagonists, the Norwegian scholar Thomas Hegghammer identifies the discourse of:

populist pan-Islamism – which emerged in the 1970s as a result of strategic action by marginalized elites employed in nonviolent international Islamic organizations. Seeking political relevance and increased budgets, these activists – who were mostly based in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia – propagated an alarmist discourse emphasizing external threats to the Muslim nation (2010/2011: 56).

What Hegghammer terms 'the foreign fighter doctrine' marked a shift from earlier Islamic resistance doctrines. By framing an external enemy, fighters from across the Muslim world travelled to fight in the name of Islam against external adversaries (*Ibid.*: 62). These external threats were not only Western: for example, Ibn al-Khattab fought a jihad against Russia to liberate Central Asia. As a consequence there emerges the problem of, "differing jihadist poles" (Gerges 2005: 58). Osama bin Laden called for jihad against Jews and Crusaders in February 1998 (Lawrence 2005: 58-62) and although al-Qaida is a terrorist organization rather than a transnational insurgency group, a distinction stressed by Thomas Hegghammer, the organization still frames the conflict between Islamic and Western poles. Doing so ensures the organization's notoriety and catalyses funding. It also serves a secondary purpose. The Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe has written:

as Schmitt tells us, in order to construct a 'we' it must be distinguished from a 'them'; and that means establishing a frontier, defining an 'enemy'. There will therefore exist a permanent constitutive outside, an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible (2005: 114).

Hence al-Qaida ideologues struggled to define an internal enemy such as to construct the self as a coherent Islamic nation. Despotism still pay lip-service to Islam, making the idea of an Islamic nation rising up against its Islamic rulers a *non sequitur*. It is much easier to construct external enemies. In Brynjar Lia's analysis of the writings of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a transition from near to far enemy is explicit: "The idea to focus on the far enemy, instead of only the local enemy regime, and expose the hidden hand of the West with a view to unifying the Jihadi camp is a striking element in al-Suri's more recent thinking" (Lia 2007: 156). Al-Suri hoped that dragging the





Western-Jewish military presence into confrontation “resolves the mental complex in the Islamic Nation with regards to defining the enemy” (cited in Lia 2007: 156). Similarly, the cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, attempting to solve the problem, argued that “our enemy is neither a nation nor a race. It is a system of kufr with global reach” (al-Awlaki 2006: 1).

#### PEJORATIVE FRAMING OF A WESTERN OTHER

The *ummah* requires an external civilization opposed to it in order to generate a discursive framework of identity. Hence the West can be framed pejoratively in order to represent an enlightened, virtuous self. Yet the narrative is such that what instead occurs is the generation of a discourse of victimisation which actually reinforces Orientalism, ensuring the West is represented as the dominant power. The human continuum can be segregated into poles of friend and foe (Schmitt 1976). Indeed, Edward Said proposed that Orientalist literature provides the basis for such a polar distinction, specifically one of Orient and Occident. Hence for the West to be brave, progressive, virile and Stoic; the East must be presented as cowardly, stagnant, emasculated, and barbaric. But Said’s Western representation of the East also works in the reverse. This pejorative framing which dehumanizes the enemy can be used to facilitate exhortations to violence such that there exist “mutually destructive stereotypes” in the West and Islamic World (Esposito 1999: xix).

Hence for Osama bin Laden, the West is the kernel of all “Oppression, lies, immorality, and debauchery” (cited in Lawrence 2005: 166). Bin Laden goads America: “Go ahead and boast to the nations of man, that you brought them AIDS as a Satanic American Invention” (*Ibid.*: 168) and that “you have continued to sink down this abyss from level to level until incest has spread amongst you” (*Ibid.*: 167). As an unlikely anti-globalization protestor, bin Laden rails against the “Giant corporations and establishments” which are created “under the name of art, entertainment, tourism, and freedom, and other deceptive names that you attribute to it” (*Ibid.*: 168).

Casting the West as the barbaric imperial aggressor necessarily represents the nation of Islam as victim. Hence, “we have to fight a defensive jihad against the invading enemy at the time of his initial attack, refusing to submit and resisting that enemy until we die trying” (Naji 2006: 256). The defence is necessary because in al-Suri’s reading, the world order, led by America, “put down laws of barbaric warfare in the modern world” (cited in Lia 2007: 311). Al-Suri argues that compared to the barbarity of Western forces who, among their crimes, rape Muslim women, “we have mercy on our part” (*Ibid.*). Indeed, the coalition forces in Iraq are “the new Mongols” and “no less barbarian than their predecessors who came along with the Hulegu [Mongols]” (*Ibid.*: 329).



Just as the West narrates a cowardly adversary (hours after the September 11, 2001 attacks President Bush addressed the world, saying "Freedom itself was attacked this morning by faceless cowards"), so too the resistance rhetoric describes a cowardly un-Islamic other. Abu Bakr Naji is explicit in his condemnation of the cowardice and fear of the enemies of the mujahidin (Naji 2006: 208-209). Moreover, despite the admittedly "stunning technological superiority" of America (cited in Lia 2007: 363), "The human structure of the enemy is weak with regards to battle" (Naji 2006: 23). Indeed, for Naji, the current structure of the American and Western military has "reached a stage of effeminacy which made them unable to sustain battles for a long period of time" (*Ibid.*).

The Western foe is framed as larger and more powerful yet at the same time inferior. This construction echoes Said's argument that the West constructed an Orient uniformly inferior, "endowed both with greater size and with a greater potential for power (usually destructive) than the West" (Said 1997: 4) but operating in reverse. Such an Eastern representation of a West inevitably leads to a victimisation narrative where Western lives are 'worth' more than Muslim lives. Bin Laden, in a letter addressed 'To The Americans', posted to a website in August 2002, stated that one and a half million children have died as a result of Iraqi sanctions, yet when three thousand "of your own people" died, "the entire world rises up and has not yet sat down" (cited in Lawrence 2005: 164). This narrative stresses the bifurcated value system that exists between the West and the pan-Islamic nation. Indeed, bin Laden asks rhetorically: "How long will fear, killing, destruction, displacement, orphaning, and widowing be our sole destiny, while security, stability, and happiness is [sic] yours?" (*Ibid.*: 175). As has been noted, the West however is not the sole architect of such violence: for example the actions of the Russians in Afghanistan and Chechnya, Israelis in Palestine, and Serbs in Bosnia – have "arguably done at least as much as U.S. foreign policy to nourish the pan-Islamist victim narrative" (Hegghammer 2010/2011: 89). This reality highlights the difficulty in constructing the external enemy as exclusively Western when exposed to the reality of multiple antagonists.

#### HYPOCRISY AND THE MEDIA HALO

Al-Qaida uses the West's own rhetoric against itself (Brachman 2008: 2) because if the foe is hypocritical, the self has greater claim to be the provider of truth. Anwar al-Awlaki traces this hypocrisy back to the earliest generations of Islam, saying "The hypocrites represented a great danger to the Muslim community during the time of the Prophet, and they still do" (al-Awlaki 2006: 6). Highlighting hypocrisy can defeat evildoers, as Naji states: "Deterring the hypocrites with proof and other means and forcing them to repress and conceal their hypocrisy, to hide their discouraged



opinions, and to comply with those in authority until their evil is put in check" (Naji 2006: 43).

The West sought to usurp universal values in the rhetoric of its war against terror (for instance President Bush's claim on September 11, 2001 that freedom had been attacked), such that taking up arms against the West was a crime in itself. The Weimar jurist Carl Schmitt argued that fighting a war for the sake of humanity denied that quality to its opponent; that "one can misuse peace, justice, progress and civilization in order to claim these as one's own and to deny the same to the enemy" (1976: 54). Indeed, bin Laden is aware of this usurpation, of the West's perennial monopoly on values which was exposed by the aftermath of 9/11:

Western civilization, which is backed by America, has lost its values and appeal. The immense materialistic towers, which preach Freedom, Human Rights, and Equality, were destroyed. These values were revealed as a total mockery (cited in Lawrence 2005: 112).

In the narrative of al-Qaida, the hypocrisy and failings of the West are compensated for by:

using a deceptive media halo and using media deception during each of his movements and when confronting any action from the mujahids. Therefore, understanding the media politics of the adversaries and dealing with them is very important in winning the military and political battle (Naji 2006: 95).

The 'media halo' is a primary concern for resistance organizations because the effective dissemination of propaganda would seem fundamental to leveraging mass support. Writing more generally, Edward Said is concerned with the dominating effect posed by a hegemonic Western media. Such a media, according to Said, can both mask and shape the voice of those who have been colonized. In the 1997 edition of *Covering Islam*, Said considered that Western media coverage, was a triumph "not just of a particular *knowledge* of Islam but rather of a particular *interpretation*" (Said 1997: 169).

So powerful is Western media that the Arabs learn about themselves from it (*Ibid.*: 56). This media acts within a "*political* context made active and effective by an unconscious ideology, which the media disseminate without serious reservations or opposition" (*Ibid.*: 49). Hence, for ideologues such as al-Suri, the media is a fundamental battleground in the conflict between East and West (cited in Lia 2007: 199). New media – prominent non-Western broadcasting and the Internet – allow the subaltern the opportunity to propagate a discourse globally. Moreover, the Internet allows the dissemination of information worldwide, instantaneously, costing only the labour involved in its production. The non-Western narrative has a platform.



Bin Laden explicitly recognises the utility of these non-Western media outlets and the hypocrisy of his enemies:

These [Western] values were revealed as a total mockery, as was made clear when the US government interfered and banned the media outlets from airing our words (which don't exceed a few minutes), because they felt that the truth started to appear to the American people (cited in Lawrence 2005: 112).

Bruce Lawrence cites the reporter Hugh Miles, who claimed that shortly after 9/11, the Bush administration made public its request that the television networks, ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, and NBC censor al-Qaida footage. Further, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice "urged all the American network chiefs not to screen videos of bin Laden" (cited in Lawrence 2005: 112). The message: the subaltern was prohibited from speaking.

Control of the media is a key theme among the al-Qaida ideologues. Anwar al-Awlaki, a jihadist ideologue associated with the al-Qaida organization, argues that, "The enemies of Islam through their control of the media and Muslim governments can promote certain figures who they deem as representing a benign form of Islam and consequently, turn them into celebrities" (2006: 14). In a strikingly similar argument to Edward Said, al-Awlaki further argues that for Muslims, it is necessary to fight "the lies of the Western Media" because the, "perceptions of many Muslims are formed by the Western media" (*Ibid.*: 6). Indeed, Ayman al-Zawahiri stressed to the mujahideen, "that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place on the battlefield of the media" (cited in Mansfield 2006: 273). Naji, echoing such sentiments, argued:

I think that one of the most important fields of success in the recent American Jewish Crusader campaigns is that on the media fields. They have succeeded in imposing terminologies and definitions of people, and in forcing upon humanity a meaning of these terminologies, corresponding to their view (Naji 2006: 17).

Given this perception, it is no surprise that the Norwegian terrorism expert Brynjar Lia argues: "What really preoccupied al-Suri was improving the quality and impact of the jihadist groups' use of the media, which as early as 1999 he considered, 'one of the very greatest gaps in jihadist activity'" (Lia 2007: 151). To that end, al-Qaida created *as-Sahab*, the media arm of their organization. Similarly, al-Suri himself suggested the importance of the Qatar-based *al-Jazeera* pan-Arab satellite television channel, which first aired 1 November 1996, as it played a pivotal role in "bringing this media conflict to millions of Muslim viewers throughout the world" (cited in Lia 2007: 199). Concerned with propagating the message, in 1999 al-Suri founded the *al-Ghuraba* Center for Islamic Studies and Media (*Ibid.*: 272). Alongside satellite television,



the Internet promulgated jihadist forums, such that there existed, in Thomas Hegghammer's phrase, "A town square of online jihadism" (cited in Lia 2007: 11). Forums allowed the largely public dissemination of al-Qaida ideology, which, whilst opening up the jihadist discourse globally, also enabled study of the discourse in the West.

#### PROBLEM OF ELITES

Generating and propagating the message is fundamental to resistance groups in order to shape the population's understanding of that group and raise the profile to secure support and funding. Although provisions for social welfare have been identified as fundamental to the success of revolutionary organizations, nowhere does the organization al-Qaida provision for the masses. The organization's ideology is concerned only with denigrating its enemies in order to facilitate violence. Externalising a foe also excludes any necessity to provide services, since the aim is to defeat the enemy rather than mobilise socially. The masses are the social fabric of society and must be aligned with the revolutionary movement in order for its success. But those who promulgated the original pan-Islamist identity discourse in the 1960s and 1970s in Saudi Arabia were well-educated elites (Hegghammer 2010/2011: 86). Moreover, contemporary al-Qaida ideologues, a small offshoot embracing that original discourse, tend to be similarly well-educated and privileged, hence possessing, however unwanted, an *ab initio* disconnect from the masses. For example, Osama bin Laden engineered media portrayals of himself in austere living conditions but the Western narrative after his death revoked that picture, releasing images of him in the comfortable Abbottabad compound.

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, privileged enough to have attended the University of Aleppo's department of mechanical engineering (Lia 2007: 34), is acutely aware of this general problem. It was al-Suri's hope that 9/11 was the moment that could "transform the confrontation into the Islamic Nation's battle after it has been ignited by the elite" (*Ibid.*: 315) and one of his slogans was: "The resistance is the Islamic Nation's Battle and not a Struggle by the Elite" (cited in Lia 2007: 477). Naji acknowledges that there exists "The power of the masses" (Naji 2006: 14) but he sees their participation only when there has been a polarization between the people of truth and the people of falsehood (*Ibid.*: 107). This problem of elites being unrepresentative of the population is not peculiar to jihadist organizations. Indeed, Frantz Fanon sees resistance ideology as likely to be propagated by elites, who, as educated individuals possess the training to produce and disseminate volumes of literature. The problem then becomes that "The culture that the intellectual leans towards is often no more than a stock of





particularisms. He wishes to attach himself to the people; but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments" (Fanon 2001: 180).

## CONCLUSION

The problems inherent in resistance, postulated by Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, echo in the discourse of al-Qaida ideologues. Identity concerns encountered by the organization also correspond to the theoretical framework of political distinctions between groupings proposed by the Weimar jurist Carl Schmitt. As such, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of jihadism is only one form of resistance to emerge in the colonial and post-colonial periods and not unique in its construction. Specifically, the organization attempted to recover the Orient by homogenizing and pejoratively framing an opposed civilization in order to construct the self; a pan-Islamic nation. As Samuel Huntington wrote, when "people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an 'us' versus 'them' relation" (Huntington 1993a: 29). Such generalizations must inevitably fall apart at the granular level such that although Ayman Al-Zawahiri wrote of his hope for a pan-national "mujahid Islamic belt" (Mansfield 2006: 132), parochial concerns of localised conflicts predominate.

Al-Zawahiri was criticised for identifying Israel as the enemy yet failing to launch any attacks on that nation (Brachman 2008: 4) and indeed al-Qaida's relationship with groups locally opposed to Israel has always been fraught. Rhetoric proclaiming the creation a new pan-Islamic nation conceals the reality of local differences. Before the rise of jihadism, Frantz Fanon argued that, "the political regimes of certain Arab states are so different, and so far away from each other in their conceptions that even a cultural meeting between these states is meaningless" (Fanon 2001: 174). Moreover, citing Western injustices condemns the Islamic nation into perpetual opposition with its Western other and casts itself as victim to a technologically superior barbarian. Al-Qaida's discourse only perpetuates the idea of a hegemonic West, from which, periodically, a resistance narrative escapes the confines of the structure before its rapid re-absorption. As with any narrative exhorting popular mobilization to violence, the conflict is presented as a defensive necessity. The other, in this case the West and its acolytes, is typically imbued with greater size and propensity for harm than the self (in this case the Islamic nation).

Invoking the West as its enemy exposed the al-Qaida organization to increased scrutiny. As such, the Internet became a double edged sword. It allowed the group to disseminate ideology globally and instantaneously yet allowed the ideology to be examined with ease. Translated documents available 'at the click of a mouse' resulted in the ideology becoming a feature of Western academic and public discussion. A





certain segment of that community, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, made available primary sources obtained by the Department of Defense, as part of "its ongoing effort to identify and release relevant information for scholars, researchers and the global public that is contained in U.S. government databases" (Brachman 2008: 4). Publishing these translations demonstrated two things: first; that the writing had been understood; second, that it was not something to be feared but rather to be studied and investigated. Hence Anwar al-Awlaki is mistaken when he argues: "The only ones who are spending the money and time translating Jihad literature are the Western intelligence services...and too bad, they would not be willing to share it with you" (al-Awlaki 2006: 16). Perhaps alone among the ideologues who understood the problem of media exposure was Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who, lamenting bin Laden's media drive, by mid-1998 suggested that bin Laden's continued media war had lost its purpose: it "now serves the infidels rather than the believers" (cited in Lia 2007: 288). Hence, whilst the organization is fundamentally opposed to the West it is nonetheless being absorbed into the Western discourse.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault in conversation with Gilles Deleuze remarked:

And when the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice. It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power (cited in Bouchard 1980: 209).

Pan-Islamist discourse articulates such an individual theory; a discourse against Western power. But the relative absence of knowledge structures in the East meant that the greater space for its consolidation is in the West. The dominant structures legitimise themselves by allowing a controlled space for dissidence – resistance discourse is then studied and vaccinated against by those in power. Indeed, for Said, "To have such knowledge over a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it" (Said 2003: 32). It can be argued that the al-Qaida mystique existing at the turn of the millennium has evaporated. Originally operating outside the Western discourse, through the Internet and *al-Jazeera* and mainly in Arabic, it was, following Foucault, an individual theory owned by the prisoners. The danger in the West was to summarise the ideology of al-Qaida without serious examination of its literature. Western scholarship now dissects the very discourse which threatens its society. It is not a great stretch to argue that the al-Qaida ideology now belongs to the West.



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